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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000110

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/EX AND AF/E

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [ER](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: ERITREA AND SUDAN

REF: ASMARA 75

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Eritrea is on bad terms with all of its neighbors except Sudan. Sudan is Eritrea's closest and most important friend, as it supplies petroleum, grain, consumer goods, political support, and cooperates on military issues. Eritrea, in turn, provides strategic political depth to Bashir and has been supportive of the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement, despite allowing various Sudanese opposition groups to maintain a presence in Eritrea. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Petroleum

As Eritrea has no proven petroleum reserves and no working oil refinery, it must import almost all of its energy needs in the form of refined petroleum products. It has stiffed previous commercial suppliers on payments because of chronic hard-currency shortfalls. Currently, Sudan provides all of Eritrea's petroleum needs, mostly by trucking in refined product from the Sudanese refinery located near Khartoum. Although the arrangement is "commercial" in nature, Sudan has provided a 60-90 day credit facility to ease the pain of payments. Sudanese Ambassador Salah al-Hassan somewhat ruefully told the ambassador April 2 that "we probably won't be paid."

¶2. (SBU) Grain, Consumer Goods, and Smuggled People

Sudan also has a soft-term commercial arrangement to provide malnourished Eritrea with grain, although Post is unclear as to the scope of this arrangement. Whatever it is, it isn't enough, as NGO sources are reporting that over 2,000 Eritreans have died of starvation recently. The Eritrean military and nomadic Rashaida tribes conduct lively cross-border smuggling operations, bringing scarce consumer items in and taking illegal emigrants out. As the border with Sudan is Eritrea's only land frontier that is not in a state of dormant military conflict, it is the least dangerous land crossing for the thousands of young Eritreans desperate to flee their despotic homeland.

¶3. (C) POLITICAL SUPPORT

Eritrea was among the first to denounce the ICC indictment of Bashir and the first country to host Bashir post-indictment. Isaias has traveled frequently to Sudan and plans to visit Juba in late April, although the Government of Sudan is insisting that Isaias stop in Khartoum first, according to the Sudanese ambassador. Relations between Eritrea and the

Government of Southern Sudan are also generally good, despite the head-scrubbing the SPLM received from Isaias during its delegation's visit to Asmara in March (ref). Eritrea is strongly against the South's secession, maintains a consulate in Juba, and reportedly cooperates with training and supplying the Sudanese People's Liberation Army. The five Darfuri rebel groups that have a presence in Eritrea are kept on a short leash by the GSE and generally maintain a low profile.

¶4. (C) Somalia and Aweys

Hard-line Somali faction leader Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys may have relocated from Asmara to Khartoum. Ambassador al-Hassan said Bashir, on his short indictment-flouting visit here in March, asked Isaias to allow Aweys to travel to Khartoum, presumably to meet with representatives of the Somali government. Ambassador al-Hassan said, "When Aweys was here he was very restricted, could not move, couldn't do anything." He also intimated that Aweys had moved his family out of Asmara several weeks ago, but did not elaborate.

¶5. (SBU) The Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement

The embassy-supported workshops for Eastern Sudanese NGO and civil society leaders that are held in Asmara with the consent of the government of Eritrea are a small but significant sign of USG support for the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement. (And one of the few areas of GSE - USG policy cooperation.) When the ambassador asked Ambassador al-Hassan what were priorities to shore up this peace accord, the Sudanese ambassador said he'd put post in touch with the leaders of the Free Lions and the Beja Congress the next time they're in town.

¶6. (C) Comment

After a break in relations in the late 1990's over Sudan's alleged support to the Eritrean Islamic Jihad, Eritrea has found in al-Bashir's Sudan a supportive, friendly neighbor. Whereas Qatar and China are generous and helpful in their own ways, they lack the long land frontier and daily contact and interaction that Eritrea and Sudan share. For the time being at least, Isaias and Bashir both benefit from camaraderie gained from the mini East African Pahriahs Club they have formed.

¶7. (U) This message has been coordinated with Embassy Khartoum.

MCMULLEN